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Chairman: Ms. Sandru (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Romania)

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In the absence of Mr. Hachani (Tunisia), Ms. Sandru (Romania), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 103: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/53/38/Rev.1, A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95-S/1998/311, A/53/167, 203, 318, 354, 363, 376, 409 and 447)

Agenda item 104: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) (A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95-S/1998/311 and A/53/308)

1. **Mrs. Farhadi** (Afghanistan) said that the situation of women in her country was extremely serious. Paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 52/145 urged all the Afghan parties to bring an end to discrimination on the basis of gender and to the deprivation of human rights of women without delay. Over the past year, the Taliban mercenaries had done everything to prevent the participation of women in the civil, cultural, educational, economic, political and social life of the regions under their military occupation. That policy, which had been applied since 1995, was continually being reinforced.

2. Women were deprived of the right to work in all the regions under occupation, and restrictions on their movements had been further tightened. The situation with regard to the right of women and girls to education had further deteriorated. The prohibition preventing girls from studying would continue as long as the Taliban military occupation lasted. Paragraph 6 of resolution 52/145 also referred to measures to ensure respect for the right of women to work and their reintegration in employment. The situation with regard to the protection of women's health and their access to health-care facilities was becoming catastrophic.

3. Resolution 1998/17 of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities took note of the numerous reports dealing with the unprecedented and extremely difficult situation of women in Kabul and the other parts of Afghanistan controlled by the Taliban, expressed its deep concern at the continuous suffering of Afghan women under the prohibitions placed upon them by the Taliban, and considered that the current policies of the Taliban with regard to the female population of the territories under their control constituted a flagrant violation of the principles of Islam and international law.

4. Islam recognized equality between men and women, and women were increasingly participating in the social progress of many Muslim countries. It was very regrettable, therefore, that in a number of Afghan cities under military occupation the education of girls and all participation by women in public life were being prevented. In the provinces that were not under military occupation by the Taliban, girls had the full right to continue their studies in public schools financed by the Islamic State of Afghanistan. Her delegation recommended that the provisions of resolution 1998/17 concerning the rights of women should be included in the draft resolution on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan to be submitted to the plenary Assembly at the current session.

5. **Mr. Ka** (Senegal) said that all Governments and United Nations bodies should promote equality between the sexes in their activities. At its forty-second session, the Commission on the Status of Women had organized a series of round tables on critical areas in that regard, including that of women and armed conflicts. It was necessary to ensure the safety of displaced and refugee women and increase the participation of women in preventive diplomacy, in peacekeeping and in the restoration and consolidation of peace after conflicts were resolved.

6. Peace was an essential condition for development in Africa. No policy to promote human rights, including the rights of women, could be successful in conditions of war and armed confrontation. His Government attached great importance to the advancement of women, the follow-up to the Beijing Conference and good preparations for the high-level plenary review to appraise the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Senegal had set up various mechanisms to promote the advancement of women. The Ministry of Women, Social Action and National Solidarity was the focal point for national policy in that field. Activities were decentralized, participative and conducted in partnership with non-governmental organizations and women's movements.

7. The Action Plan for Women, adopted in 1996, aimed at combating poverty among women, raising the educational level of women and girls, improving the state of their health, increasing their participation in political life and strengthening mechanisms for promoting and financing women's activities. Those objectives were part of his country's follow-up to the Beijing Conference.

8. New initiatives must be taken to achieve overall equality between the sexes within the United Nations system, and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) should be strengthened.

9. Measures to combat trafficking in women and girls must be stepped up, and everything should be done to halt traditional practices affecting the health of women and girls, such as female genital mutilation. In intensifying its campaign against such practices and against all forms of violence against women, the Senegalese Government would shortly submit a bill to the National Assembly further penalizing such acts.

10. He hoped that the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women would be completed before the plenary review to appraise the progress made in the implementation of the Platform for Action.

11. **Ms. Al-Awadhi** (Kuwait) said that the situation of Kuwaiti women had evolved very rapidly thanks to a social and economic development plan and work programme, elaborated by her Government, in which women's situation had been addressed from the human development perspective. The principal aim was to provide women with the same educational and training opportunities as men and to facilitate the integration of women students, particularly from university and vocational-training institutions, into the labour market.

12. The principle of equality between men and women was enshrined in the Constitution of Kuwait, which guaranteed women the right to education and employment, to freely choose the nature of their work and to engage in commercial and professional activities. Women currently accounted for a third of Kuwait's workforce and were increasingly aware of their important role in social and economic development.

13. Women were gaining access to positions of power and authority in Kuwait; they already occupied a number of important posts in administration, academia, diplomacy and social affairs. However, the contribution of Kuwaiti women to society was not limited to paid employment, but included work in the charity, cultural, social, artistic and vocational fields.

14. The women of Kuwait continued to suffer from social and psychological problems resulting from the Iraqi occupation. Some women had been widowed, while others were tortured by the uncertainty surrounding the fate of their husbands, who had been taken prisoner by the Iraqi authorities. Moreover, Kuwaiti children exhibited symptoms of anxiety and fear as a result of having witnessed the brutality with which their fathers had been taken from them. The burden of that tragedy was exacerbated by Iraq's continuing refusal to offer any information about Kuwaiti prisoners and hostages, as had been made clear in a series of meetings between Iraq and representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

15. **Mrs. Nicodemos** (Brazil) said that her country attached great importance to the advancement of women and the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women. She noted with satisfaction that enormous progress had been made in the past few decades as a result of persistent and combined efforts at the international, regional and national levels. The United Nations had played a crucial role in integrating women into political, social and economic life, raising awareness about women's rights and incorporating a gender perspective into all areas of human activity.

16. In Brazil, the open dialogue between civil society and the Government had given renewed impetus to the women's movement. "Strategies for Equality", the national plan of action to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, consisted of a set of public policies as well as initiatives by civil society aimed at eliminating gender discrimination and promoting full citizenship for women. Women's participation in political life was perceived in Brazil as a key element for achieving gender equality and introducing a gender perspective into all Government activities. Her Government had recently drawn up a national programme for the promotion of equal opportunities in the public service, which constituted a model for society as a whole.

17. Her delegation fully supported the decisions taken by the General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women concerning the high-level plenary review to appraise and assess progress achieved in the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action. The objective should be to reaffirm the commitment to the Beijing Platform and focus on strategies to eliminate obstacles to its implementation.

18. **Mrs. Gaspard** (France) said that her delegation fully supported the statement made on the previous day by the European Union, which demonstrated, *inter alia*, the role played by community action programmes in ensuring equality of opportunity for women and men. France had been celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights through a series of regional activities which would culminate in several weeks in the holding of a major international seminar at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

19. Since its establishment, the United Nations had played a fundamental role in efforts to eliminate discrimination against women. At the forty-second session of the

Commission on the Status of Women, the High Commissioner for Human Rights had stressed that women's rights were an integral part of human rights. Unfortunately, gender inequality continued to exist throughout the world, even in countries whose legislation proclaimed equality in the civil and social spheres. No so-called cultural reasons could be used to force women into isolation, legitimize harmful traditional practices or restrict the access of women to health care, credit and equal pay. Nevertheless, no country in the world, even the most advanced, had achieved a perfectly satisfactory situation with regard to equality of the sexes.

20. Her delegation commended the work carried out by Ms. Angela King, the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. Current data indicated that it could be possible to achieve gender equality in the Secretariat by the year 2002 or at the latest by 2006, which demonstrated the effectiveness of the policy pursued.

21. In France, the Council of Ministers had adopted a draft revision of the Constitution, soon to go to the Parliament, that would make it possible to pass laws promoting equal access for women and men to elected office and to posts in the administration. Although 30 per cent of government officials were women, there were still too few in elected assemblies. Also, France had invited the European Union to meet in Paris in spring 1999 for a major conference on women in political, economic, social and cultural decision-making at which participants would look at the strategies being implemented in each country in application of the recommendation adopted by the European Union Council of Ministers following the Beijing Conference; the major objective of the recommendation was balance between women and men in decision-making.

22. The achievement of freedom of choice in bearing children, thanks to an effective family planning system, access to contraception and the possibility of voluntary termination of pregnancies had been a major turning point for women's rights in France; at the same time, France had one of the highest birth rates in Europe, owing to its strong family policy and well-developed public service for looking after young children. Another major change had been that for over a quarter of a century more girls than boys had gone on to higher education, and for 20 years more and more women had entered the labour market despite the economic crisis.

23. Her delegation particularly welcomed the agreed conclusions concerning violence against women adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its latest session, but emphasized that all forms of prostitution must be condemned and combated. For the next session of the Commission, her delegation looked forward to the adoption of the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on the right to petition.

24. Gender mainstreaming was a major long-term objective; in that task, a strong and determined administration had a role to play, as shown by the work of the Secretariat.

25. She supported the view expressed by a previous speaker that the 1991 high-level expert report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development on the role of women in development was still worthy of the Committee's attention, as it showed those who were not yet convinced that equality was perhaps a necessary condition for growth and for transforming modes of governance.

26. **Ms. Noda-Núñez** (Guatemala) explained that half of the women of Guatemala were of Maya, Xinca and Garifuna descent. Sixty per cent of the women lived in rural areas and 45 per cent were under 15. While the illiteracy rate in Guatemala was about one third, it could be as high as 90 per cent for indigenous women in rural areas. Most Guatemalan women were below the poverty level, which hindered their involvement in development. Also, despite a legal framework favourable towards improving women's status, discrimination and inequity persist[ed] in male-female relations, and opportunities for women to participate were fewer, as reflected in low levels of self-esteem.

27. Although that reality was hard, improving the status of women along the lines of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Beijing Platform for Action had been the guiding theme of the Government's policies. Considerable progress had been made: full respect for human rights – women's as well as men's – and the mainstreaming of women in development were priorities for the Government, and the process of involving women fully in the life of the country at all levels was well under way.

28. All sectors in the country had responsibly played their allotted roles under the peace agreements between the Government and the Unidad Nacional Revolucionaria Guatemalteca (URNG), and among their commitments were some along the lines of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action.

29. The importance of women's role in the current stage of consolidating peace in Guatemala, begun in December 1996, had been proven time and again: as many major United Nations texts indicated, peace was linked to

improving the status of women because women were a fundamental force in community leadership and more so within families. In Guatemala, which was multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural, the function of women as guardians of the culture that defined each population group, and as vehicles for transmitting that culture, was of fundamental importance.

30. On the institutional level, there had been definite progress in improving women's status through the establishment of the National Women's Forum and the activities of the National Office of Women, which were aimed at the full inclusion of women in national development. Also, the Ministry of Planning, through its national equality plan, was working to ensure defence of women's rights and also women's equal participation in the economic, social, cultural and political fields.

31. The number of women in senior decision-making posts had been significantly increased: various posts of minister or deputy minister were held by women; there were women members of Congress, officials in the political parties and Supreme Court judges. Indigenous women were participating more, and had taken up leadership positions in social and political forums.

32. Full participation by women would take time, however: various institutional and social mechanisms militated against women, and women's participation in economic affairs and decision-making still needed strengthening. An initiative had been laid before Congress to expand women's participation in management and in elected posts and include them more in political life. If the initiative succeeded, lists of candidates for elected posts would have to include at least 30 per cent women.

33. The poverty of many women, especially indigenous women in rural areas or as heads of family in marginal urban areas, had moved the Government and many non-governmental organizations to design poverty eradication programmes; as a result, new opportunities were opening up for women, with lines of credit for companies controlled by women or for family microbusinesses.

34. In the labour market, participation by women in income-generating activities was rising, although it was concentrated in areas that did not require high levels of skill. Assessments of women's work were clearly too low, with no measurement made of the contribution to the national economy of women's work in the home. Guatemala therefore welcomed the decision by the Economic and Social Council to pay special attention to the feminization of poverty, and to have poverty eradication on its agenda for 1999.

35. An educational reform project had recently been finalized; it recognized the respective roles of the parents, the family, and the school. Activities under the project would without a doubt synergize the establishment in Guatemala of a culture of tolerance and respect for difference while aiming to achieve respect for the rights of all people and all peoples.

36. Although eradicating violence against women remained a major challenge in Guatemala, the Family Violence Act provided a framework for achieving that goal.

37. Since the signing of the peace agreements, every factor in the power balance had suffered some degree of change. However, the changes were still vulnerable: the time had been too short to achieve radical changes, particularly as the causes of Guatemalan society's ills — and the ills affecting Guatemalan women — were centuries old. They could not be eradicated overnight, but the way ahead was open and Guatemala would continue making all the efforts needed to improve women's status in all areas of the country's life.

38. **Mr. Arda** (Turkey) said that Turkey had endorsed the Beijing Platform for Action without reservation and had prepared its national plan of action with contributions from women's non-governmental organizations; it had submitted its second and third periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and in the light of CEDAW's recommendations was adopting measures to improve the status of women further. It was also considering lifting its reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and was working on a series of new laws, from the civil code to the social-security regulations, to change current provisions considered discriminatory against women. In January 1998 it had adopted an act making domestic violence a crime.

39. Turkish women were conscious of their rights, which Turkey's secular system guaranteed would be achieved relatively quickly with continuous improvements in women's status and with no need for affirmative action. Promoting women's rights was one of the greatest achievements of the United Nations, and he contrasted the current situation, where women's rights were seen as human rights, with that of a generation before. Governments were trying to achieve gender mainstreaming in their programmes and policies, and while some countries were moving faster than others, all countries were moving in the same direction. Consequently, it was a pity that the Organization itself was in need of some affirmative action.

40. The Turkish Government strongly supported the call by the Commission on the Status of Women for the

eradication of traditional practices harmful to women and their human rights, but was concerned that certain practices, such as forced marriage, that caused the sufferings of millions of women might thereby be overlooked. He called on INSTRAW, UNIFEM and the Division for the Advancement of Women to fill the breach by providing more comprehensive data on traditional practices that adversely affected women.

41. Turkey welcomed the interaction between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights because it reaffirmed women's rights as human rights and should therefore be strengthened.

42. Turkey believed that it was an inherent right for women and girls to have access to confidential and affordable health services, including sexual and reproductive health. It therefore welcomed the fact that the Commission on the Status of Women would have on the agenda for its forthcoming session items relating to women and health and to institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, and would thus complete its review of the critical areas identified in the Platform for Action. In that connection, Turkey took the view that implementation of the Platform for Action by Governments was a political issue that required high-level commitment and sufficient resources if it was to succeed.

43. Turkey welcomed the decision by CEDAW to ban participation of members of the Committee from taking part in considering reports from countries of which they were nationals, since the independence of members in such deliberations was vital. However, the ban should not prevent the Committee from using such members as resource people.

44. Turkey welcomed the inclusion of sexual crimes, including rape and enforced pregnancy, in the scope of the International Criminal Court as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

45. Turkey, which had participated in the working group concerned, hoped that the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on the right to petition would soon be completed.

46. **Mr. Suh Dae-Won** (Republic of Korea) said that, while many countries had integrated gender equity into their national action plans, full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action had been hindered by lack of political will, financial difficulties and other obstacles. Political leaders should renew their commitments, and civil society should continue its close involvement.

47. His delegation supported all efforts to mainstream the gender perspective in the programmes and activities of the United Nations and looked forward to greater efficiency and synergy among the relevant organizations. More attention should be given to collecting gender-specific data, in order to better inform policy-making, while the draft optional protocol to the Convention should be adopted without delay, in order to provide legal remedies to discrimination and to violations of women's rights.

48. Too often, tradition and custom were invoked to justify discrimination against women and violation of their rights to property ownership, reproductive health and employment. The girl child could be particularly vulnerable to such practices, with serious consequences for her physical and mental health. Governments and the international community should do more to adopt appropriate legislation and raise awareness in that area.

49. The establishment of a more egalitarian society was one of the Government's policy priorities. To that end, it had amended its nationality laws, so that men and women were placed on an equal footing with regard to parental rights and the right of foreign spouses to Korean nationality, while plans were under way to amend the civil code, so as to improve the status of women within the family. The Republic of Korea remained committed to eliminating discrimination against women in government institutions and the private sector.

50. Despite the shifting of attention away from the Beijing Platform to the current global crisis, the Republic of Korea continued to uphold the goals of that Platform, convinced that women's full participation in society was vital to sustainable development and prosperity.

51. **Mr. Shamsudin** (Malaysia) said that Malaysia would continue to promote women's rights, and its efforts to foster an environment conducive to the advancement of women in the political, economic and social spheres remaining a priority. However, it was increasingly concerned about the effects of globalization and market liberalization on the most vulnerable, particularly women, children and older persons, in many developing countries: the economic downturns they were facing reduced their capacity to meet their commitments to protect the rights of those affected.

52. Pursuant to the Beijing Platform for Action, Malaysia had implemented a comprehensive national plan to empower women and improve their status; the relevant national machinery had been strengthened, enforcement mechanisms for the 1994 Domestic Violence Act had been established, public-education efforts were under way and gender-sensitization training programmes for the relevant agencies

had been put in place. Under the current national plan (1996–2000), special attention was being given to the role and status of women in a range of development programmes.

53. Legal, institutional and other constraints on fuller participation by women in development had been reviewed: the relevant ministerial division dealing with women's issues had been upgraded to a full-fledged department, and laws deemed discriminatory against women continued to be reviewed. For example, there was now no gender distinction in the right to inheritance. Moreover, in January 1998, Malaysia had withdrawn its reservations to certain articles of the Convention.

54. Malaysia, recognizing the adverse effect of poverty on women's quality of life, had introduced a Government-funded loan scheme to help those, particularly women, in extreme poverty, and had instituted courses and workshops for the economic advancement of rural women.

55. Malaysia would provide the secretariat for a regional conference on the economic advancement of rural and island women in the Asia-Pacific Region to be held in Malaysia later in October 1998. Malaysia would continue implementing specific regional and subregional training, research and information exchange activities within that framework.

56. Malaysia had developed a gender-sensitization package for government officials and had mainstreamed gender issues in all training programmes in order to facilitate participation by female students in science, advanced technology, engineering and technical education and to increase female participation in the labour market; in addition, gender-studies centres and research programmes had been established at a number of higher-education institutions.

57. Malaysia was concerned about the upwards trend in the traffic in girls and women for sexual exploitation, which thrived on poverty and unemployment. Greater regional and international efforts would have to be made to curb such activities, including those in cyberspace. Malaysia would continue its cooperation in that field, and believed that the efforts should emphasize inculcation of strong religious and moral values throughout society.

58. Malaysia believed that the international community had a duty to protect the rights of women in armed conflict: violence against women in conflict areas should be investigated and appropriate punishment meted out.

59. Malaysia believed that efforts against traditional practices that were harmful to the health of women and girls would be more effective if there were fundamental changes in societies' attitudes, and therefore considered education and public-awareness campaigns crucial. It believed also that alternatives to such harmful traditional practices should be explored, and called upon the developed countries to provide the developing countries with the necessary assistance, including financial resources.

60. Malaysia welcomed the significant progress in women's representation at senior levels within the United Nations system and encouraged the Secretary-General to continue his efforts towards achieving an equal gender distribution at all levels. It supported the recommendation by the Economic and Social Council that a gender analysis should be integral to triennial comprehensive reviews, and that those reviews should reflect developments in the advancement of women in the operational activities of the United Nations system. In that connection, the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women for the period 2002–2005 would be very significant.

61. **Ms. Pang** (Singapore) noted that some progress had been made in women's issues: more women had access to health care and education, and female participation in the public sphere was increasing. The overall situation of women in the world was, however, dismal. Two thirds of the world's 1 billion illiterate people were women and more than 70 per cent of the world's population living in extreme poverty were women. *The Human Development Report* of 1998 had pointed out that women's achievement fell below that of men in every country and concluded that there had been serious delay in creating opportunities for women.

62. In some areas the situation of women was getting worse. With greater participation in the workforce, women had had to take on increasing responsibilities; for example, 30 per cent of households worldwide relied on women as the primary breadwinner. In almost every society, women worked longer hours than men, especially in Africa and Asia. The growing global economic crisis could only worsen that situation as more families fell below the poverty line.

63. When women could not balance work and family, it was easy to conclude that there was a fundamental antagonism between the two. Yet men and women should never have to choose between personal fulfilment and family obligations, which undermined the whole idea of family as the core institution in society.

64. In Singapore, women were encouraged to pursue fulfilling careers, but special programmes had been initiated to help women balance family and work responsibilities. In addition, under a 1961 women's charter, husbands and wives had the same legal rights, duties and liabilities.

65. Another possible effect of the increasing burden on women would be failure to achieve the aims of the Beijing Conference. Indeed, that conference had reported that most of the goals of the Nairobi Conference had not been achieved. Real progress was needed before the year 2000 review in order to ensure implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and avoid having once again to express disappointment with the lack of progress.

66. **Mr. Al-Hariri** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the advancement of women was not a matter of one party granting or relinquishing rights to another: rather, it was a matter of inalienable rights, realized through the opening up of educational opportunities and establishment of the necessary conditions in which women could realize their potential in society and more fully contribute to social progress and prosperity.

67. The advancement of women in the Syrian Arab Republic was a national priority. The fact that women accounted for 50 per cent of all those in education, particularly higher education, facilitated their full participation in all aspects of life.

68. Syrian women enjoyed full political, social, cultural and economic rights as confirmed by national data. A national strategy for Syrian women until the year 2005 was being implemented through cooperation between national and international institutions. A national committee was working with the ministries involved in women's affairs and social and economic development issues to implement the main goals of the Beijing Platform for Action. Syrian women were gaining access to positions of responsibility and decision-making in all areas of political, social and economic life. Legislation had been amended, in keeping with greater awareness of women's issues. In Syria, women accounted for 20 per cent of all lawyers and 15 per cent of judges. His Government was committed to improving those figures and was working with international organizations on projects to guarantee women work opportunities, through training and the elimination of obstacles such as poverty. Women currently accounted for 20 per cent of the Syrian workforce and the Government was committed to improving that number.

69. In Syria, women were guaranteed full enjoyment of their rights to health services, while the number of women working in the health sector had increased. Women's and family health-care centres currently accounted for 75 per cent of all health-care centres in Syria, while women played a prominent role in the media.

70. The Arab women living under Israeli occupation in the Syrian Golan, Southern Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories were deprived of their fundamental rights to education, health-care and freedom. Women's organizations in Syria were working with international organizations and human rights networks with a view to guaranteeing the full exercise of the rights of the Syrian women in the Syrian Golan through an end to the occupation.

71. Syria enjoyed cooperation with various United Nations agencies on women's issues, particularly with regard to rural women and their integration into productive employment. The Constitution firmly upheld the principle of full equality between men and women, while Syria's social and democratic climate allowed a deep understanding of the affairs of the nation and its citizens. The advancement of women on a par with men in Syria was the key to development of the individual, the family and society, with a view to creating a nation based on progress and equality.

72. **Mr. Tsogt** (Mongolia) welcomed the results of the special session of the Economic and Social Council on the integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of major United Nations conferences and summits, and stressed the important work done by the United Nations system in the implementation of the decisions of the Beijing Conference.

73. Her Government had identified critical areas of concern, including women and economic development, the status of rural women, violence against women and human rights, poverty reduction and health, and had adopted a national programme of action for the advancement of women. Initiatives on job creation and income generation had been implemented in cooperation with a number of regional, international and non-governmental organizations. She further noted that the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for Women (INSTRAW) would hold a national training seminar in March 1999, in collaboration with the Government, on sex disaggregated data and the use of statistics and indicators on gender issues in policy design.

74. Ensuring equal rights for men and women had always been one of the fundamental principles of State policy, and abuses such as forced marriages, forced abortions and prostitution were considered criminal acts. However, alcohol abuse and worsening poverty had been identified as major causes of the increase of crimes and violence against women. Women's non-governmental organizations and the authorities were collaborating closely to provide medical, moral and legal support to victims of such crimes. Like many countries in transition, Mongolia was facing many social challenges. The Government had mobilized all resources to

remedy those problems and welcomed continued assistance from donor countries, international financial institutions and the United Nations.

75. **Ms. Tarr-Whelan** (United States of America) expressed the hope that delegations would, over the following days, reaffirm the commitments made at Beijing and reinvigorate their actions in those areas. With regard to gender mainstreaming, she stressed that women would in future be able to contribute their full potential only if they enjoyed equal rights, equal access and equal protection. She expressed satisfaction at the commitment shown by the Secretary-General and the heads of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes to mainstream a gender perspective, and was encouraged that efforts were under way to ensure that every person at every level of the United Nations system had the skills and ability in keeping with the commitment shown at the highest levels. She would work closely with colleagues to ensure that the International Year of Older Persons and the five-year reviews of the International Conference on Population and Development and of the World Summit for Social Development would incorporate a gender perspective.

76. Her delegation was encouraged by preparations undertaken by the Commission on the Status of Women for the five-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and looked forward to further discussing that review, which should include best practices and lessons learned. Strategies to overcome obstacles and increase public awareness would contribute to realization of the Beijing commitments. Most importantly, the review should not "reopen Beijing" but rather reaffirm Member States' commitment to the Declaration and Platform for Action. Her Government, for example, was working at the highest levels to mainstream women's issues.

77. The Government was also working bilaterally and multilaterally to eradicate the growing problem of trafficking in women and girls and she invited others to join in that fight. The crucial role played by non-governmental organizations had been recognized, and efforts to combat trafficking in women and girls had been elevated to a new level of priority in March 1998 when, at an event attended by Secretary-General Kofi Annan in honour of International Women's Day, President Clinton had issued an executive order on combating violence against women and trafficking in women and girls.

78. She welcomed the draft resolution on traditional practices affecting the health of women, and urged Governments and non-governmental organizations to work together, in consultation with religious and cultural leaders, to eliminate such practices. She expressed satisfaction that preparations for the five-year review of the International Conference on Population and Development focused on the health, education and status of women and girls since social investments in women yielded the highest return to society, allowing them to be more economically productive and to engage in public life. As the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approached, she stressed that delegations to the Beijing Conference had reiterated their commitment to that Declaration and its application to all people, affirming that human rights were women's rights and women's rights were human rights.

79. **Mr. Rasheed** (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the "apartheid of gender" knew no age limit and had life-long ramifications. Over time, it was translated into social and economic oppression, discrimination, disadvantage, deprivation and exploitation. When women were denied full participation in the political, social and economic development of their communities, they were denied their basic human rights.

80. In the follow-up to Beijing, UNICEF had focused its attention on girls' education, the health of girls and women, and children's and women's rights. Its country programmes provided for integrated and coordinated action, offering new opportunities for advocacy and programme development at national levels.

81. UNICEF had been a partner in initiatives aimed at creating a positive, enabling environment for gender equality, and most countries had prepared national plans expressing their commitment to action. However, much remained to be done, particularly in the areas of the girl child, violence against women, women in armed conflict and the human rights of girls and women.

82. States could utilize human-rights instruments to facilitate decision-making and resource allocation. They could act to guarantee girls access to and the benefits of social services, creating opportunities for girls and women to obtain information and participate more fully in decision-making. A rights-based approach could eliminate such practices as female genital mutilation and early marriage, as well as sexual abuse, violence against girls and women, and trafficking.

83. States should delay no further in ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and in amending their national legislation accordingly. However, legislation alone was not enough. Policy and legislation should be implemented so as to make a real difference to the lives of girls and women.

84. Strategies for ensuring the participation of women and girls should include consideration of obstacles to the enjoyment of their rights. The principle of indivisibility of rights was of utmost importance. Women and girls suffered doubly when the violence they suffered in the home or in the community also infringed their right to development, participation and education.

85. Particular attention should be given to socialization of girls and boys through parent/caregiver programmes and the education of children. Socialization processes provided the means for breaking old patterns and creating new values based on respect for human rights, including the rights of girls and women.

86. Adolescents required more focused attention. While girls education and health had been addressed by many national plans, equal importance should be given to their participation. Experience showed that girls had the awareness and resources to resolve their problems, and enhanced participation would facilitate self-expression and meaningful inter-personal communication. Girls needed to acquire the skills and confidence in early childhood that would allow them access to leadership roles, to informed choices and to participating on an equal footing in change processes. Education and the media played a critical role in that regard.

87. The availability of resources was crucial. With dwindling international aid and social and economic crises in some countries, the rights of women and children were likely to suffer. More widespread application of the 20:20 initiative (Platform for Action, para. 358) should help to increase the resources required for basic social services.

88. Reform of the United Nations and of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) should help place the needs of women and children higher on the United Nations agenda. UNICEF viewed UNDAF as a means for accelerating implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and was working closely with other agencies to that end. The strategy provided an opportunity at the country level for a unified approach to human rights and gender issues, addressed in complementary ways. UNICEF looked forward to the Beijing review in 2000 and called on its partners to work together to ensure the equal rights of girls and women.

89. **Mr. Fullemann** (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that women did not constitute a vulnerable group solely on the basis of their gender; some, such as expectant mothers, had special needs and ran special risks. In addition, women often suffered from general patterns of discrimination, which could be exacerbated during periods of armed conflicts. The tragic plight of women in armed conflicts resulted not from a lack of humanitarian rules to protect them but rather from the failure to implement existing rules. The changing nature of warfare posed a number of challenges which required a redoubling of efforts by all engaged in promoting implementation of those rules. The recent adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court could prove an important step towards enhancing compliance with humanitarian law; there was no longer any doubt that rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, and forced sterilization and other forms of sexual violence constituted war crimes. Bringing those crimes, whether they occurred in international or national armed conflicts, under the jurisdiction of the court was a major achievement in the struggle against impunity.

90. It was necessary to ensure that women fully benefited from measures aimed at meeting the needs of the general population and, as reaffirmed by the Beijing Conference, that specific steps should be taken to help those with special needs. The general legal principle of non-discrimination did not preclude different treatment where such was justified on legitimate grounds and, therefore, humanitarian law also sought to address the needs of women in employing broad inclusive terms such as "civilian population" and prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sex. Humanitarian law also contained specific provisions addressing the particular needs of women. The ICRC would seek to ensure that the principle of non-discrimination was adhered to in the application of humanitarian law and, where women faced serious and systematic discrimination, would have to decide whether the interests of the victims were best served by its continued presence. ICRC must be able to carry on its work in a non-discriminatory fashion and needed to make a careful assessment of the possibilities for meaningful dialogue with the relevant authorities, with a view to changing their conduct.

91. ICRC had recently completed a detailed analysis of how best to undertake its future work, identifying current challenges and ways to better assist victims. In that context, it had decided to examine the situation of women in armed conflicts, and field delegations had been providing gender-specific information on current activities for some time. As part of the campaign to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, a questionnaire would also be circulated to a cross-section of the population, including war-affected women, in a number of different countries. In-depth group discussions would be organized and experts and organizations experienced in that area would be consulted. The information gathered would form the basis for an

assessment of humanitarian law and operational activities with a view to developing guidelines to improve humanitarian action in connection with armed conflict.

92. That initiative was faithful to the principle of impartiality, which ruled out an exclusively gender-specific approach, although giving priority to those in greatest need required that the needs of all victims, including those of women, should be addressed. ICRC hoped that those initiatives would lead to a better understanding of the problems faced by women in the event of armed conflict and thereby contribute to a more effective response by the international community.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.